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Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

INSIDE
TRACKS

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Lake Honoring Day Focuses on High School Students

The 2002 Flathead Lake Honoring Day, held under sunny skies on September 24, featured education stations ranging from fish management to water quality to lake legends. This year's event focused on about 90 high school students who are in advanced biology and natural history classes in schools around the valley.

The Honoring Day is sponsored by FWP and CSKT under the guidance of the Flathead Lake and River Fisheries Co-management Plan, which guides the management of the lake through 2010. The Flathead Lakers and the University of Montana Biological Station are integral to the event's success. The purpose of the event is to raise awareness of water quality and fisheries issues in the communities around the lake. The overall goal of the Co-management Plan is to conserve native fish, specifically bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout; to encourage harvest of nonnative fish, such as lake trout and lake whitefish; and to maintain Flathead Lake's high water quality.

The day opened at Sacagwea Park with introductions, and a talk and dedication by Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes' elder Patrick Pierre. Following Patrick's talk, the Bigcrane Singers drumming group performed for the students. These ceremonies were performed by the Tribes to show their respect and stewardship for Flathead Lake, and to include the students

TRIBAL ELDER
Patrick Pierre
spoke at the Honoring Day about being stewards of Flathead Lake for future generations.



THE BIGCRANE SINGERS delivered a stirring honoring song to help dedicate the Flathead Lake Honoring Day.

in their recognition of the lake's importance to our quality of life.

Following these opening ceremonies, the students divided into groups and went through four educational stations at Sacagwea Park, and through stations to the north at Yellow Bay State Park and the University of Montana Biological Station at Yellow Bay. Students learned about lake conservation, biology and management of native and nonnative fish, tribal views on water quality, catching and cleaning nonnative fish, and even Flathead Monster sightings. At the University of Montana Biological Station, students

learned about the biological web of life in the lake and factors affecting it. At Yellow Bay State Park, students learned about park resources around Flathead Lake and were quizzed on Flathead Lake trivia.

The Lake Honoring Day would not be possible without the help of many. FWP and CSKT thank the participating schools, which included: Flathead High School (Kelly Morrow, teacher); Polson High School (Jim Rogers, teacher); and Ronan High School (Phil Engeldrum and Chris Briske, teachers). Members of the Bigcrane Singers included: Ed, James, and John Tom Bigcrane; Allen Eddison, Jesse Bevis, Dwight Stone, Dusty Shelby, and Chaney Bell. Research Specialist Jim Craft conducted the sessions at the University of Montana Biological Station. Dick Zimmer, Ron Mohn, and Doug and Terry White conducted the fishing and fish preparation station. Lunches for the students were prepared by the Salish and Kootenai College food service. A number of representatives from CSKT, FWP, and the Flathead Lakers presented information at the stations. The City of Polson graciously allowed use of the park facilities for the event.



***FISH DISTRIBUTION.** Dick Zimmer talks to interested students about the distribution of Lake Whitefish in Flathead Lake.*

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Ninepipe Wildlife Management

Each year, as the summer winds down, as sure as frost and falling leaves, come the questions, "How's the pheasant population looking?" or "How's the pheasant season going to be this year?" or "How was the pheasant hatch this year?" Be it a colleague, a waitress, a reporter, or a hunter from out of town, it seems like everybody wants to know what to expect from the upcoming pheasant hunting season.



JOHN GRANT, Ninepipe Wildlife Management Area (WMA) Manager, works to enhance food and cover for upland birds and waterfowl. Here, Grant shows barley from a food plot.

Being the manager of the Ninepipe Wildlife Management Area (WMA), I have a unique perspective on the outlook for the area that is the heart of ring-necked pheasant range in western Montana. But being responsible for managing more than 3,500 acres of wildlife habitat, I scarcely have time to think about the size of the population, let alone monitor it. Providing an outstanding environment for the birds to survive and thrive, and ample cover for hunters to enjoy, is a full time job. The "if you build it, they will come" philosophy seems like a good one to embrace for pheasants in this area.

Numbers are certainly important - more so to some folks than others - but even in relative terms, it's hard to provide a brief and meaningful answer to "How's the hunting going to be?" I am an avid pheasant hunter, but not one who measures the quality of the hunt by the number of birds bagged, or even the number encountered for that matter. What's important to me is that there's opportunity to freely access relatively large tracts of land with a real possibility of putting up a rooster. In my opinion (biased as it is), the pheasant hunting is going to be great this year!

This year is not going to be one, like in 1998, when bagging daily limits was common, or when pass shooting was very productive, but there are pheasants out there - plenty of them. Exactly how many is impossible to say, but that's the case for most wildlife populations, and with pheasants it really doesn't matter.

As a wildlife biologist, I understand that pheasants have a short life expectancy, irrespective of hunting, and they have a tremendous capacity to reproduce. Given that hen pheasants are not hunted and that many hens will mate with a single rooster, hunting will not substantially affect the population. I understand also that when the pheasant population is down, so is the hunting pressure. That's not to say that the hunting is not so good; in fact, at a place like Ninepipe that gets such heavy hunting pressure, fewer pheasants often translates into better hunting due to reduced competition with other hunters.

The Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge (which is closed to hunting) and the surrounding Ninepipe WMA is the core

of the best pheasant habitat in the Mission Valley. A management priority on the WMA is pheasant production. Nesting (hiding) cover, food plots, brushy thickets, and marshes occur throughout. Adjacent tribal lands and federal Waterfowl Production Areas add substantially to the territory available for producing and hunting pheasants. In years of greater pheasant abundance on the WMA, abundance and distribution off the WMA increase as well. Local hot spots separate from Ninepipe occur in the valley every year too.

In 1999, during the critical period when pheasant chicks were hatching, the weather was really nasty for a couple of weeks. It really put a damper on the production and harvest that year. The population is rebounding after a couple decent years of spring weather. Most hens appeared to be successful at hatching their eggs this year. Some seemed to work awful hard at it (as pheasants will), because I was still seeing new hatches in mid-August. The year 2002 won't be remembered as a year with a bumper crop, but just how good the hunting is in 2002 is going to be up to what kind of a year any individual hunter wants to make it.

The habitat conditions are great and there are birds. Breathing fresh air, getting exercise following your favorite hunting dog around, and enjoying the unsurpassed splendor of the Mission Mountains could make for a wonderfully unforgettable day afield, even if you forget your gun! 🦌

Flathead Indian Reservation The Flathead Indian

Reservation was created in 1855 and is home to the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes. The Mission Valley, in the east central portion of the Reservation, was at the southern extreme of the last continental glacier which retreated some 12,000 years ago. Heavy, fertile soils and hundreds of small wetland basins left by the glacier, in conjunction with a favorable climate and a major irrigation project make this land highly productive for many wildlife species. The area is also part of a major migratory flyway in the Rocky Mountain Trench, and serves as a resting area for many birds in spring and fall. The area provides high quality upland bird and waterfowl habitat, hunting, and wildlife viewing. Winter raptor viewing is nationally acclaimed. Visitors should always be on the alert for bears. Grizzly and black bears occupy the nearby Mission Mountains

THE NINE-PIPE WMA exists because of the hard work, dollar contributions, and vision of hunters.



ent Area Is Tops for Birds

and bear sightings on the open prairie of the valley floor are not uncommon. Beginning in 2000, the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes began to acquire lands specifically for fish and wildlife habitat. Wetland and riparian restoration projects are currently being planned for these parcels.



THE NINEPIPE AREA offers terrific waterfowl hunting. The area is a major migratory bird flyway and resting place in the Rocky Mountain Trench.

Hunting & Fishing Licenses The Flathead Indian Reservation is open to hunting and fishing by non-tribal members who purchase the appropriate license and permits. A joint state/tribal license and the appropriate hunting/fishing stamps are required of hunters and anglers who are not members of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. A Federal Migratory Bird Stamp is required of all hunters 16 years of age or older who hunt waterfowl. Hunting by non-tribal members is allowed only for ducks, geese, mergansers, coots, Hungarian partridge and pheasants. The entire reservation is closed to all other hunting by non-tribal members. Consult the Flathead Indian Reservation joint Fishing, Hunting, and Recreation Regulations for season dates, methods of taking fish and game as well as bag and possession limits.

Recreational Use - Tribal, State, and Federal Lands

- Tribal trust lands are open for recreational uses, including hunting and fishing, by non-tribal members with the appropriate joint state/tribal license and permits unless specifically posted as closed.
- Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge is open for wildlife observation and photography, environmental education, and fishing during appropriate seasons. No boats or floatation devices are allowed. It is closed to all public access (including game retrieval) during the hunting seasons. Portions of the refuge are closed to public access during the nesting season, March 15 to July 15.
- Waterfowl Production Areas (WPA) are generally open to hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching and photography. No other uses are allowed except under special permit.
- Ninepipe Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is open to hunting, fishing, and other recreational uses compatible with wildlife conservation.

Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge


Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge is an easement refuge on Confederated Salish-Kootenai Tribal land and is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge is not open to hunting at any time. Seasonal closures prevent human disturbances to birds and

enhance the quality of hunting in the Mission Valley by providing birds with a sanctuary during the hunting season.

Ninepipe Wildlife Management Area The Ninepipe Wildlife Management Area is owned and managed by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. The WMA was acquired, developed, and is managed primarily with funds generated by hunting license fees and excise taxes on hunting equipment. Beginning in 1953, these lands were acquired for the conservation of waterfowl and pheasant habitat and to provide a place for public hunting. Land continues to be added to the WMA primarily for the conservation of game bird populations although a great variety of wildlife species benefit from habitat enhancement and protection.

Lake County Waterfowl Production Areas Waterfowl Production Areas are units of the National Wildlife Refuge System within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. WPAs are acquired with funds from the sale of Federal *Migratory Bird Stamps* (Duck Stamps) and are managed to provide wetlands and nesting cover for waterfowl and many other species of wildlife. The WPAs are open to public hunting.

Rules & Restrictions

- Firearms are permitted only during open hunting seasons. Target practice or clay-bird shooting is prohibited at all times on the refuge, WMA and WPAs.
- Motor vehicles are prohibited from operating on WPAs and WMA. Parking is allowed in designated parking areas or along the shoulder of public roads.
- No fires, camping, or overnight use is allowed.
- No commercial activities are allowed on the WMA. Any commercial use on the WPAs requires a special use permit.
- Blinds must be removed daily.
- Non-toxic shot is required for all bird hunting on the Flathead Reservation. 



YOUNG HUNTER. Luke Fischer is happy with this fine black bear he took during the spring 2002 bear season.



SNAPPY'S FISHING. Edgerton School 4th graders recently fished at Snappy's Pond as part of their Hooked on Fishing program. The 70 students caught and released over 200 rainbow and cutthroat trout. Thanks to Snappy's for hosting several thousand Hooked on Fishing Students each year!



HUNTERS SHOULD FIND very good numbers of white-tailed deer as they head out to the field this season. The general deer/elk season gets underway October 27. Here Sabra Jones of Kalispell shows off her first deer, a nice whitetail buck taken during the 2001 hunting season.



HUNTER EDUCATION STUDENTS at the recent Kalispell area Hunter Education field day work with instructor Charlie Stafford. The students are wearing orange vests provided by Flathead Electric Co-op's Roundup for Safety Program. The program provided over 1,000 vests for students this year. Thanks FEC!

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